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BULLETIN OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

THE BLAIR COLLECTION

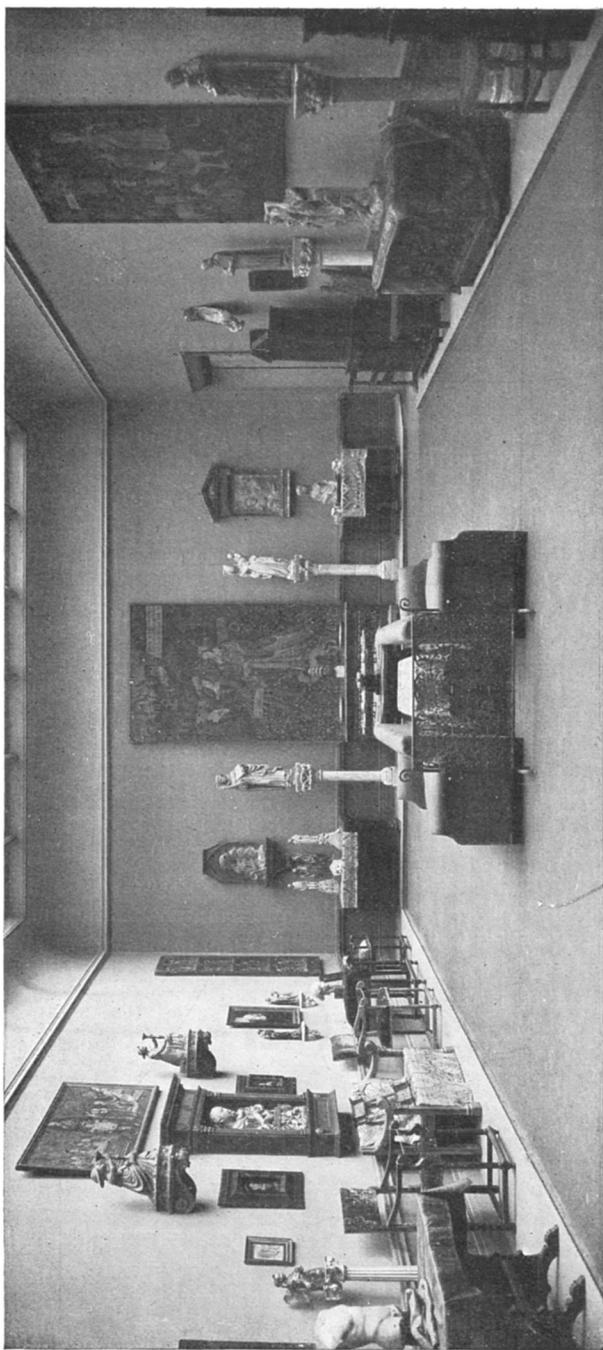
THREE is no general agreement yet whether a severe simplicity should be the keynote of an art gallery, by way of concentrating the visitor's whole attention upon the objects it contains, or whether a principle of harmony requires sumptuous treasures to be sumptuously housed. We have seen an American museum interior finished in white plaster and yellow pine. We have also seen the French Republic cel additions to the Louvre galleries in beautifully carved oak.

The Mary Blair Collection of Mediæval and Renaissance Art which has been on public view here since January challenges attention not only by its wealth of rare and beautiful specimens in the fine and applied arts, but also for the fine taste which has governed its installation. Its wall hangings of a soft azure fabric vastly become richly colored tapestries, polychrome sculptures and gilt carvings. Fragments of old silk damask lend a sober note to creamy marble and to wormeaten wood carvings. Gothic colonnettes with carved bases and capitals are nobler supports for stone sculptures of the Gothic period than painted wooden pedestals. Details of this order do not precisely transport us to the churches and castles from which these objects hail. But they create an atmosphere of the studio far more favorable to our enjoyment of them than the odious bareness of an old-fashioned gallery hall. Two fine examples of stained glass and many of French Renaissance furniture contribute much to the note of domesticity with which Mrs. Blair has invested her household collection, in the course of its gradual formation at her Paris residence, and here.

Few of her 125 exhibits can be named and none can be described in this column. Engravings of several fine numbers will be found in the illustrated catalogue of the collection. Among additions posterior to its composition one may single out the large carved wooden group, portraying the Virgin and Child enthroned. The multiplied parallel lines in the drapery of this early, Romanesque sculpture manifestly echo the early Buddhist painters and carvers of China and Japan. A standing XIII century French Gothic Virgin in stone has the same wholesome rusticity as her seated mate in the Antiquarian Society's gallery down stairs. There is a charming little XIV century Virgin, seated under an architectural canopy, from the cathedral of Tournai. A colored head of Christ wounded, from Picardy, figured at the Turcoing Exposition of 1906. Its crass realism savors of Spain.

Republican Florence contributes a fine wedding chest front. A terra cotta copy of Donatello's Pietra Piana Madonna has the pictorial quality of Florentine relief sculpture. An early German Adoration, of carved wood colored, has two very German shepherds peering over a walled fence with a couple of captivating angels. One of the men must have served as a Lanzknecht; for he is the very type of the old German mercenary soldier. A late XV century tapestry of Flemish fashion depicts a courtly courtship in the open, with the walls and towers of Dijon, so labelled by the weaver, in the background of his landscape. Preservation perfect. This hanging once adorned the palace of the dukes of Burgundy at their little art capital. Lucas Cranach is represented among the XV century paintings by a chastely draped Salome.

A. E.



MARY BLAIR LOAN COLLECTION OF MEDIAEVAL AND RENAISSANCE ART